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Report of the Economic and Social Council

Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies

Sustainable development and international economic cooperation

Economic and Social Council
Substantive session of 1999
5–30 July 1999
Item 10 of the provisional agenda**

Regional cooperation

Letter dated 17 May 1999 from the Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith the text of the Yerevan Declaration on Decentralization (see annex) adopted at the international conference on the theme "Decentralization in Eastern and Central Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS): conditions of success", which was held from 26 to 28 April 1999, at Yerevan.

Elected representatives and government officials from more than 20 countries in the region, representing both local and central levels of government as well as a number of international organizations, met at Yerevan to exchange views on decentralization in their respective countries. The aim of the conference was to assist the countries of Eastern and Central Europe and the CIS in smoothing and accelerating the process of transition towards appropriate forms and degrees of decentralization. The participants of the conference noted the critical work of the United Nations in this regard, and requested the United Nations to continue to convene such regional forums, strengthen various institutions dealing with decentralization and develop exchange networks.

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** E/1999/100.

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I should be grateful if you would circulate this letter and its annex as an document of the General Assembly, under items 12, 39 and 100 of the preliminary list, and of the Economic and Social Council, under item 10 of the provisional agenda.

(*Signed*) Movses **Abelian**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex

Yerevan Declaration on Decentralization

1. Elected representatives and government officials from both local and central levels of more than 20 countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) met at Yerevan to exchange views on the programme of decentralization in their respective countries.

2. The participants recognized the importance of decentralization in the process of democratization and transformation of the economy and society from the previous centralized and overpoliticized systems. At the same time, they underscored that successful decentralization policies required a strong and supported centre.

3. They stressed that although problems and challenges are common, solutions may vary from country to country according to specific social, economic and cultural peculiarities.

4. It was stressed that the Constitution and basic legislative texts should provide the legal framework for decentralization. A clear distribution of competencies between State administration and self-government, and within self-government between different levels, has to be organized. This clear distribution of competencies does not exclude cooperation between them.

5. It was underlined that a financial resource basis commensurate with the functions and responsibilities of various levels of government and self-government should be secured. An effort must be made to secure financial flows for the local authorities that broadly correspond to their particular needs, conditions and responsibilities. For this purpose, the development of institutional frameworks that encourage cooperation between central and local authorities and the enhancement of relevant skills are mandatory. Financial decentralization should stimulate and foster local responsibility and the use of resources for quality service delivery and socio-economic development. In the context of financial decentralization, appropriate mechanisms to ensure a fair equalization and distribution of resources should be adopted. At the same time, strong and efficient systems of accountability and control should be put into place.

6. To make decentralization successful, it should be accompanied by a wide range of measures for human resources development. These efforts should be aimed at both elected officials and administrative staff. Human resources development encompasses training activities, which target the refinement and reinforcement of knowledge, skills and ethical values, but also the promotion of organizational change. Conference discussions reflected the existence of broad generic needs in the areas of policy analysis; legislative drafting; human resource management; financial management; NGO resource management; entrepreneurial development; gender and environmental sensitivity training; and training for trainers. However, training cannot be effective if it is not properly integrated into and supported by coherent and consistent policies in recruitment, placement, motivation and career development.

7. Civil society and NGOs have a major role to play in decentralization and local government reform. Strong democracies need strong citizens. Citizen participation demands a culture that will prompt them to play their parts as stakeholders, partners in decision-making, standard-setters and evaluators of performance in local government. Citizen education on rights and responsibilities is an important element. There are examples of curriculum materials for citizenship education from countries at the conference. Citizens need to learn rights, but also their obligations as members of a nation and community.

8. The participants recognized that exchange of information, experiences and practices is a very useful tool to assist countries in the process of planning and implementing decentralization. This exchange could be greatly enhanced by maximizing the use of modern information technologies, encouraging distance learning, communication exchange and the sharing of ideas. By fostering the establishment and maintenance of information networks and clearing house facilities on a global and regional basis, the United Nations can play a critical role in the growth of virtual communities of practitioners and scholars dedicated to the purposes of decentralization, administrative reform, citizen participation and democratization.

9. The participants therefore requested the United Nations to continue to facilitate the ongoing dialogue on decentralization in countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the CIS by convening similar regional forums, developing exchange networks, and strengthening national regional and local institutions dealing with decentralization issues.

10. Finally, the participants expressed their heartfelt appreciation to the Parliament and Government of Armenia for hosting and organizing this conference and for the generous hospitality extended to all. They also conveyed their thanks to the United Nations, which through the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and the United Nations Development Programme, strongly supported the organization of the conference.